IN LIGHTER VEIN

Drawn by R. B. Birch

THE INFALLIBLE DETECTIVES

THE ADVENTURE OF THE "MONA LISA"

BY CAROLYN WELLS

IN their rooms on Fakir Street the members of the International Society of Infallible Detectives were holding a special meeting.

"If any one of you," said President Sherlock Holmes, speaking from the chair, "has any suggestions to offer—"

"My dear Holmes," interrupted Arsène Lupin, "we don't offer or accept suggestions any more than you do."

"No," agreed the Thinking Machine; "we merely observe the clues, deduce the truth, and announce the criminal."

"What are the clues?" inquired M. Lecocq of the company at large.

Raffles looked gravely at the old gentleman, and then smiled.

"The clues," he said, "are the frame thrown down a back staircase, the wall vacancy in the Louvre, and the nails on which the picture hung."

"Is the wall vacancy just the size of the 'Mona Lisa'?" asked M. Dupin.

"That cannot be ascertained, since the picture is not available to measure by," returned Raffles. "But the 'Mona Lisa' is gone, and there is no other unexplained wall vacancy."

"The evidence seems to me inconclusive," murmured M. Dupin. "Is there not a law concerning the *corpus delicti?*"

"That 's neither here nor there," interrupted Arsène Lupin, and Raffles wittily observed, "Neither is the picture."

Sherlock Holmes passed his white hand wearily across his brow.

"This meeting must come to order," he

said. "Now, gentlemen, you have heard a description of the clues—the discarded frame, the vacant space, the empty nails. From these I deduce that the thief is five feet, ten inches tall, and weighs 160 pounds. He has dark hair and one gold tooth. He is fairly healthy, but he has a second cousin who was subject to croup as a child."

"Marvelous, Holmes! Marvelous!" exclaimed Dr. Watson, clasping his hands in ecstasy. "He is already the same as behind bars."

"I don't agree with you, Holmes," declared Arsène Lupin. "It is clearly evident to me that the thief was a blond, rather short and thick-set, and looked like his great-aunt on his mother's side."

Holmes looked thoughtful. "I can't think it, Lupin," he said at last; "and if you 'll go over the clues again *carefully,* you 'll perceive your fallacious inference."

"Münsterberg says," began Luther Trant; but President Holmes cut him off, and said, with his saturnine smile, "Gentlemen, we must get to work scientifically on this problem. Unless we find the stolen picture, and convict the thief, we are not worthy of our professional fame. Now, how much time do you think we should take to accomplish our purpose?"

"I could find the old daub in a week," said M. Dupin; "you only have to reason this way. If—"

"There now, there now," said the Thinking Machine, querulously, "who wants to hear another man's advice? Let us all go to work independently of one another. A week will be more than enough time for me to produce both picture and thief."

"A week, bah!" scoffed Raffles. "I can accumulate the missing canvas and the missing miscreant in three days' time. I 'm sure of it."

President Holmes kept on with his saturnine smile, and said, "Arsène, how much time do you require for the job?"

"Two days and carfare," replied Arsène Lupin. "And you yourself, Holmes?"

The smile of Sherlock Holmes became a little saturniner as he returned quietly, "I already know where it is; I 've only to go and get it."

"That is n't fair," broke in Luther Trant, cutting short Dr. Watson's appreciative remark.

"Perfectly fair," declared Holmes; "I 've had no more advantage than the rest of you. We 've all heard a list of the clues; I 've deduced the solution of the mystery. If you other fellows have n't, it 's because you 're blind to the obvious."

"Always distrust the obvious," began M. Dupin, didactically.

President Holmes paid his usual lack of attention to this speech, and went on:

"There 's no use of further conversation. We 're not a lot of consulting amateurs. We 're each famous, unique, and infallible. Let us go our various ways, work by our various methods, and see who can find the picture first. Let us meet here one week from to-night, and whoever brings with him the 'Mona Lisa' will receive the congratulations of the rest of us, and incidentally the offered reward."

"Marvelous, Holmes! Marvelous!" cried Dr. Watson before any one else could speak.

But there was n't much to be said. Famous detectives are ever taciturn, silent, and thoughtful, but looking as if the universe is to them an open primer.

After saying good night in their various fashions, the detectives went away to detect, and Sherlock Holmes got out his violin and played "Her Bright Smile Haunts Me Still."

A week slowly disengaged itself from the future and transferred its attachment to the past. Again the rooms in Fakir Street were cleared up nice and tidy for the meeting. Eight o'clock was the hour appointed, but no one came.

"Hah!" muttered Holmes, "they have all failed, and they dare not come and admit it. I alone have succeeded in the quest, I alone have the priceless 'Joconde' safe in my possession."

"Marv—" began Dr. Watson; but even as he spoke the door opened, and M. Dupin entered, with a large canvas under his arm. The picture was wrapped in an old shawl, but from its size and from the size of the smile on Dupin's face, even Watson deduced that the canvas was the one at which Leonardo had slung paint for four years.

"But, yes," said M. Dupin, carelessly, "I have it. Only I will wait for the others, that I may display my prize amid greater applause than I expect from you, M. Holmes."

Holmes's smile was only slightly saturnine, but before he could make a caustic reply, Lecocq came in, bearing a large roll carefully wrapped in paper. He beamed genially, and then catching sight of the shawled object leaning against the wall, he frowned.

"What have you there?" he cried. "Is it perhaps the gilded frame for the picture I bring?"

Goaded beyond endurance by these scathing words, Dupin sprang to the shawl and tore it off.

"Behold the 'Mona Lisa'! Found! Oh, the glory of it!"

"Ha!" cried Lecocq, and unrolling his

roll, he, too, showed the original, the indisputably genuine Leonardo da Vinci masterpiece!

Holmes looked at the twin pictures with interest.

"They are doubtless the real thing," he declared—"both of them. There is no question of the genuineness of either. It must be that Da Vinci painted the lady twice."

"Marvelous, Holmes! Marvelous!" chanted Watson.

But the two Frenchmen were not willing to accept Holmes's statement. They were volubly quarreling in their own picturesque tongue, and the purport of their excellent French was that each believed his own find to be the real picture and the other a copy.

Into this controversy shambled the queer old figure of the Thinking Machine.

"Squabble if you like," he shrilled at them. "It does n't matter which wins, for I have the real 'Mona Lisa' at home. I would n't risk bringing it here. Both of yours are copies, and poor ones at that."

Just then appeared Luther Trant, followed by three messenger-boys. Each bore a picture of the "Mona Lisa," which he set down beside the ones already there.

"One of these is the real one," declared Trant. "I had n't time to decide which, and my seismospygmatograph is broken. But I 'll find that out later. Anyway, it 's one of the three, and I 've found it."

Into the hubbub caused by this announcement Raffles bounded, his face shining with hilarity.

"I 've got it!" he cried, and his followers entered.

There were five messenger-boys, whose burden aggregated eight "Mona Lisas"; three sandwich-men wore two "Jocondes" each; and two washerwomen brought a clothes-basket containing four.

"These are all vouched for by experts," declared Raffles, "so one of 'em must be the real thing."

"Oh," said Arsène Lupin, sauntering in, "*do* you think so? Well, I have a dray below, piled up with 'Mona Lisas,' for each of which I have a signed guaranty by the best experts."

Sherlock Holmes stood looking on, his smile growing saturniner and saturniner.

"Now, gentlemen," he said, in his most cold-chisel tones—"*Now,* gentlemen, will you please step into the next room?"

They stepped, but delicately, like Agag, for the floor was knee-deep in "Mona Lisas," and as they entered the next room, behold, it was like stepping into a multiscope; for the four walls were lined—*lined,* mind you—with "Mona Lisas." And every one—every single one—bore indisputable, indubitable, impeccable, incontrovertible evidence of being the real Simon-Pure article.

Quite aside from the chagrin of the detectives at knowing Holmes had outnumbered them, conceive of the delight of being able to gaze on scores of "Mona Lisas" at once! Remember the thrills that thrilled you when you stood in the Louvre and looked upon just *one* masterpiece of the great painter; then imagine those thrills multiplied until it was like fever and ague! It was indeed a great psychological moment.

"Are they *all* genuine?" at last whispered M. Dupin, while Raffles began to compute their collective value to collectors.

"All guaranteed by experts," declared Holmes; and just then the telephone sounded.

"Mr. Holmes?" said the chief of police.

"Yes," replied Sherlock, saturninely

"I have to inform you, Mr. Holmes, that we have the 'Mona Lisa.' The thief, who is a paramaranoiac, has returned it to us, and confessed his crime. He is truly penitent, and though he must be punished, there will doubtless be found extenuating circumstances in his full confession and his return of the picture unharmed. I 'm sure you will rejoice with us at the restoration of our treasure."

"Huh!" said Holmes, a little more saturninely than usual, as he hung up the receiver, "when a picture has been restored as often and as poorly as that has, one restoration more or less does n't matter. Now, gentlemen, you will please begin to give me a successful imitation of a moving-picture show."

"AS A MATTER OF FACT"

BY ROBERT EMMET WARD

WOULD I could banish from the use of men
  The poor old, doddering phrases that we learned
  In fiction's youth! We "leave no stone unturned,"
And "Victory perches," even now, as then;
The "white road, like a ribbon, winds" again;
  The "crystal-clear spring gushes" unconcerned.
  Cannot we leave them to the rest they 've earned,
Being used *ad nauseam* by both tongue and pen?

But what 's the use? Why paw the earth and swear?
  I wreck my nerves and waste both ink and breath.
  No matter what I read, or how I skim it,
"Along these lines" is certain to be there,
  And "in the last analysis," worked to death—
  Which are, in the vernacular, the limit!